

 SCHOLASTIC

# Scholastic RED<sup>®</sup> High-Quality Professional Development

Secondary School  
Kirkwood, Missouri  
2005

**IMPACT STUDY**





SCHOLASTIC RED:  
HIGH-QUALITY  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

# Scholastic RED High-Quality Professional Development

Secondary School  
Kirkwood, Missouri  
2005

*Prepared by the Scholastic  
Research and Evaluation Department*

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# Foreword

Teachers *can* make a difference. There is overwhelming evidence that having a high-quality teacher affects student learning and is a critical factor in explaining student test score gains (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; King Rice, 2003; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Indeed, a frequently cited study by economist Eric Hanushek (1992) suggests that “a string of good teachers can offset the effect of poverty for a low-income student.” As of 2006, the *No Child Left Behind* act (2002) requires that all teachers must be “highly qualified” in the subject areas in which they teach.

Improved professional development is at the heart of state and local efforts to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to become highly qualified. This focus reflects recent research that suggests professional development can improve teachers’ skills and practice in the classroom (Porter et al., 2000; Desimone et al., 2002), and that better teaching improves student performance (Cohen & Hill, 2000).

While definitions of highly qualified teachers emphasize content over process, the language used to describe high-quality professional development is often more inclusive of instructional method. Title IX, Section 9101(34), of the *No Child Left Behind* act of 2001 outlines several interacting factors that exemplify a high-quality professional development program:

- High-quality professional development implies rich, research-based content that is purposefully chosen to deepen and broaden the knowledge and skills of the teachers and administrators in the program.
- High-quality professional development is an integral part of a broad school-wide and district-wide education improvement plan that gives educators the knowledge and skills they need to provide students with the opportunity to meet state and national content standards.
- High-quality professional development requires a sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused approach that goes beyond the traditional one-shot workshop or conference to facilitate immediate practice and application.
- High-quality professional development demands the guidance of experienced educators and other professionals who have a thorough and up-to-date understanding of the content and who can fully engage the participants in the desired learning.

*“I loved being able to work at my own pace and being able to implement strategies in my classroom. The strategies focus on what students NEED.”*

— 7<sup>th</sup> GRADE SCIENCE TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

Scholastic RED is a professional development program for teachers in Grades K–12 that is grounded in the principles of high-quality professional development outlined in *NCLB* (2002):

- Scholastic RED courses contain rich, research-based content to help teachers master a variety of strategies that help students improve their reading skills.
- Scholastic RED implementation personnel work with sites to integrate the program into the school- or district-wide plan so that courses link directly to teacher and student learning outcomes.
- Scholastic RED uses multiple instructional approaches to deliver a sustained and comprehensive course of study that promotes student achievement and enhanced content knowledge and practice for teachers.
- Scholastic RED is classroom-based and offers opportunities for self-paced instruction as well as face-to-face collaboration with experienced colleagues and trained facilitators.
- Scholastic RED combines advanced technology and personalized coaching to give teachers many opportunities to practice and apply new teaching strategies in a safe and supportive setting before applying them in the classroom.

The following study provides an overview of how the distinctive features of Scholastic RED meet the *NCLB* (2002) criteria of high-quality professional development. Furthermore, the study examines the effectiveness of the program among middle and high school content-area and special education teachers in the Kirkwood School District, Missouri.

# The Need

## Background

The ability to read a variety of texts with both comprehension and fluency is arguably the most important skill necessary for students to succeed in school. Reading ability is also necessary for the responsibilities of adult life and to participate in our democratic society. It is not surprising, then, to find that reading has been a critical component of most reform efforts and accountability programs, up to and including *No Child Left Behind* (2002).

Although the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has charted improved reading scores for elementary students over the past 30 years, the scores for middle and high school students have remained stable or declined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). “These results are consistent with what we’ve seen on state assessments—more growth in elementary than in secondary grades, more gains in math than in reading,” notes Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust. “It’s time we got very serious about bringing reform to our secondary schools, particularly to help older students grasp the critical reading skills they will need to be successful in high school, college, and the workplace” (The Education Trust, 2005).

In the Kirkwood School District in Missouri, every middle school content-area teachers is required to teach one class of reading. The purpose is to help teachers better understand effective strategies for reading and understanding content text, as well as to understand how reading impacts student achievement in their content areas. District personnel reported that some content-area teachers were hesitant to teach the class because they did not feel adequately prepared to teach reading. Scholastic RED offered a non-threatening way to meet the needs of these teachers by allowing them to learn individually online before coming together as a group.

*“It’s nice that we are building  
a common literacy vocabulary  
and vision in the district.”*

—9<sup>th</sup> GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

# The Solution

## Scholastic RED Overview

Built on the principles of effective adult learning and teacher professional development, Scholastic RED offers a sophisticated model of professional development to educators. Research suggests that two broad aspects of professional development can affect teacher knowledge and practice and student outcomes (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000). These two aspects are the content of the program and the ways in which it is designed and delivered.

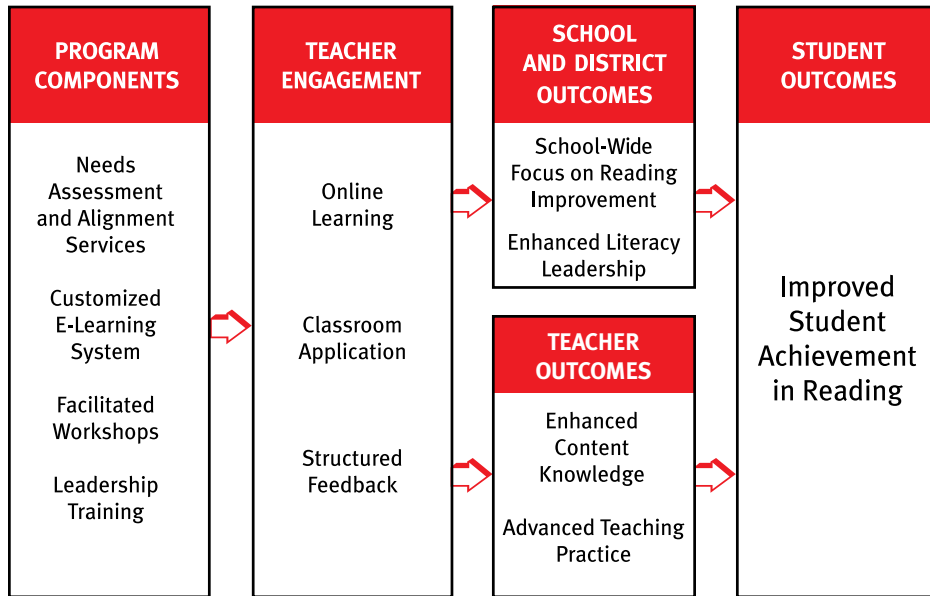
### CONTENT

Scholastic RED is an online and in-person professional development program intended to assist teachers in Grades K–12 in developing the skills necessary to improve reading achievement. The intent of the Scholastic RED courses is to provide teachers with coherent information about research-based practices.

The initial online presentations are supplemented with in-person facilitator demonstrations of best practices in reading instruction and practical suggestions and guidance for classroom application.

The program also provides a rich array of resources that permit teachers to delve deeply into topics and strategies that meet their particular instructional needs. By implementing Scholastic RED, districts have the opportunity to create a common language around reading and a framework for ongoing school- and district-wide improvement efforts.

**Figure 1: Scholastic RED Professional Development Theory of Change**



These program elements are embodied in the Scholastic RED Professional Development Theory of Change (see Figure 1). The left side of the figure shows the parts of the Scholastic RED program that help teachers, students, and school sites to meet their goals. The first column, Program Components, works at the site or district level to customize the professional development program to meet local needs and train local facilitators. The second column outlines the teachers’ learning experiences in the program: online learning; classroom application; and structured feedback.

The right side of the figure shows the three outcomes, or goals, of the program: improved student achievement in reading; enhanced content knowledge and practice for teachers; and increased capacity and leadership at the site and district level to support effective literacy instruction.

*“I liked having a few months to work at my own time and pace—so much more fulfilling (and useful) than a single day workshop where you can easily be overwhelmed.”*

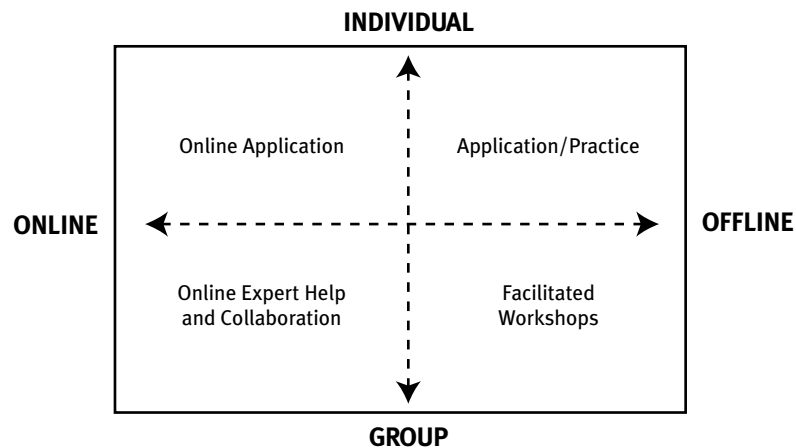
—9<sup>th</sup> GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Scholastic RED seeks to engage teachers in the learning process by offering multiple, mutually reinforcing learning opportunities, or e-learning. Figure 2 illustrates the ways in which the individual online components and the offline components of the Scholastic RED e-learning system work together to meet the diverse learning needs of teachers. The online components make it possible for teachers to work through the courses at convenient times and locations. Teachers have access to electronic bulletin boards, facilitated sessions, and on-demand expertise.

Teachers have both online and offline opportunities for practice, reflection, and feedback as they apply the strategies with their students and reflect both individually and in study groups. In addition, study groups encourage teachers to become part of a school-based professional learning community as they work face-to-face with a trained facilitator and colleagues to refine their knowledge and practice.

**Figure 2: Professional Development Through E-Learning**



# Research Study

## Intent of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Scholastic RED Professional Development program in Missouri's Kirkwood School District using the criteria for high-quality professional development as defined in Title IX, Section 9101(34), of the *No Child Left Behind* act of 2001. According to the federal criteria (NCLB, 2002), a high-quality professional development program includes activities that:

- Improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified (A:i).
- Are an integral part of broad school-wide and district-wide educational improvement plans (A:ii).
- Give teachers and administrators the knowledge and skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging state academic content standards and student academic achievement standards (A:iii).
- Are high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom; and are not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences (A:v).
- Advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies that are based on scientific research and strategies for improving student academic achievement or substantially increasing the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers (A:vii).

An additional aim of the study was to examine teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the online and offline activities and resources as they relate to personal learning and classroom application. In particular, teachers gauged their level of confidence in teaching reading in their content-area courses, and their overall satisfaction with the Scholastic RED Professional Development program.

*“There was a lot of energy in the room...everyone was seeing great responses and connections with students.”*

—7<sup>th</sup> GRADE RED DISTRICT FACILITATOR  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Study Participants

In 2005, twenty-five middle and high school content-area and special education teachers participated in the Scholastic RED Professional Development course “Middle School Literacy: Improving Text Comprehension” over the period of one semester. The course content focuses on reading strategies for content-area texts, designing and using a variety of assessments to measure students’ understanding, and routines for managing the classroom to meet individual student needs. Twenty-three of the 25 teachers completed the course. The sample included participants from a mix of content areas, grade levels, and schools. Of this group:

- Seven teachers taught language arts and/or reading classes
- Six teachers taught special education classes
- Four teachers taught social studies classes
- Four teachers taught mathematics classes
- Three teachers taught science classes
- One teacher taught foreign language classes

As noted earlier, only those content-area teachers who taught middle school were required to teach a reading class (n=9). Special Education teachers and Reading/Language Arts teachers (n=13) were exempt from teaching an extra reading class, as were high school content-area teachers (n=3).

## Implementation

Teachers completed ten online sessions, which included research and background information on key topics and strategies (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension, writing, classroom management), model lessons, and related simulations and learning activities. Teachers developed lesson plans related to key strategies with the expectation that they would use them in their classrooms, and they participated in monthly study groups to share ideas, discuss classroom implementation, further their knowledge and skills, and reflect on learning. Teachers also created a resource binder of effective strategies, routines, and student work for future reference.

Scholastic RED implementation personnel trained two Kirkwood School District educators—a literacy specialist and a content-area teacher—as RED District Facilitators. The two facilitators met with the teachers four times during the semester, with over 90 percent attendance at each study group. During the study groups, facilitators modeled effective strategies while teachers shared excerpts from their online journals, provided evidence of practice in the classroom, and reflected on their experiences with the group. “There was a lot of energy in the room,” noted one facilitator “...everyone was seeing great responses [in their classrooms] and connections with students.”

# Results

## Teacher Survey Data

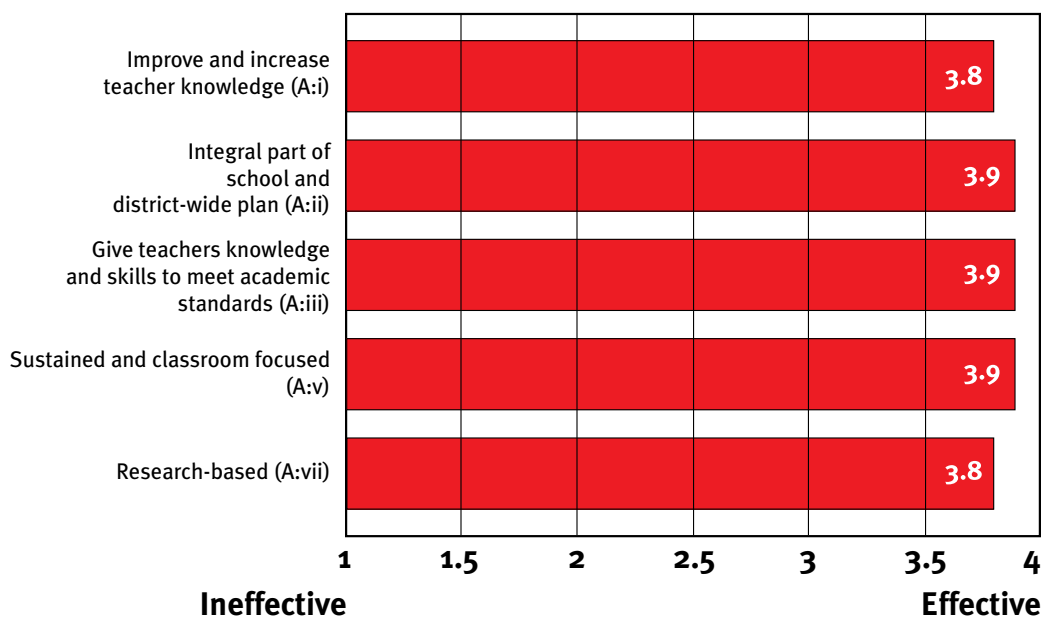
Teachers completed a survey at the end of the Scholastic RED course. As required by the Missouri Department of Education, the survey used the state standards of high-quality professional development, which align with the *NCLB* criteria, to measure the effectiveness of the program. The survey asked teachers to rate the level of effectiveness of both the content and delivery of the program on a 4-point scale (1 being ineffective and 4 being very effective). The survey also included space for explanatory comments for each survey item and open-ended items relating to overall program quality.

The quantitative data were analyzed for central tendency and the qualitative data were analyzed using both *a priori* and emergent coding schemes. *A priori* codes were determined prior to analysis and related to the *NCLB* criteria, while emergent codes sought to capture themes that emerged during analysis (e.g., the significance of time). Although the small sample size restricted the quantitative analysis to descriptive statistics, the qualitative data provided a context for interpreting the findings of the statistical analysis.

## Efficacy Of Scholastic RED Content

The Missouri Department of Education Professional Development Standards are consistent with the federal criteria in section 9101(34) of the *No Child Left Behind* act of 2001. These federal criteria (*NCLB*, 2002) state that high-quality professional development programs should draw on *scientifically based research to increase teacher knowledge, are classroom focused, and align with a site-based improvement plan* to give teachers the knowledge and skills to meet academic standards (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Level of Effectiveness of Scholastic RED Content in Meeting NCLB Criteria for High-Quality Professional Development\***



\* teacher mean responses

“This course often served as my conscience this year. I knew most of this information, but the course was a constant reminder to apply that knowledge!”

— 9<sup>th</sup> GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## RESEARCH-BASED

Teacher ratings of the effectiveness of the Scholastic RED research-based materials and activities to improve and increase their content knowledge were positive ( $M=3.8$  with 4 being very effective). Several teacher comments referenced the range and quality of the resources, as well as how the content connected to their previous learning: “This course often served as my conscience this year. I knew much of the information, but the course was a constant reminder to apply that knowledge!” Other comments suggested that teachers would continue to draw upon the rich resources online long after the course was over: “I am so glad this course will be online. I want to finish downloading my PDF files for Session 10. I also want to refer back to examples of struggling readers.”

Several teachers reported that the ancillary effects of the program included increased motivation and meeting personal learning goals: “It motivated me to work much harder to help kids master textbook reading.” Teachers noted that they “enjoyed” learning new strategies and collaborating with colleagues. Other teachers felt that the research-based elements of the program “confirmed” their assessment of student needs, and provided them with concrete, actionable strategies to meet those needs.

## CLASSROOM-FOCUSED

Overall, teachers were very positive ( $M=3.9$  on a 4-point scale) about the ways in which Scholastic RED directly linked to improved student learning. They were also positive about the relevance of the teaching strategies ( $M=3.8$ ). Teacher comments noted that the program focused on “what students need” and strategies that “can be applied to *all* students.” Teachers also connected the newfound strategies with state-mandated testing: “I have a strategy to help me help my kids to take the Missouri Assessment Program [MAP].” While their confidence in being able to successfully implement the strategies in the program was slightly lower ( $M=3.6$ ), several teachers commented that it was just a matter of time: “I am still gaining knowledge and confidence...but I am light years from where I was!”

Indeed, the theme of time cut across several categories. Several teachers thought they needed more time to practice and apply classroom strategies, collaborate with colleagues, and explore the research-based materials. But time was also seen as a positive output of the program. Teachers appreciated the time they spent taking the course and the lack of “meaningless busy work.” They thought the program was “very time efficient” and especially suited to the schedules of teachers. The program was also seen as “timely” and meeting the immediate needs of the district, teachers, and students.

*“I have a strategy to help me help my kids to take the Missouri Assessment Program.”*

— 8<sup>th</sup> GRADE MATHEMATICS TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## SITE-BASED

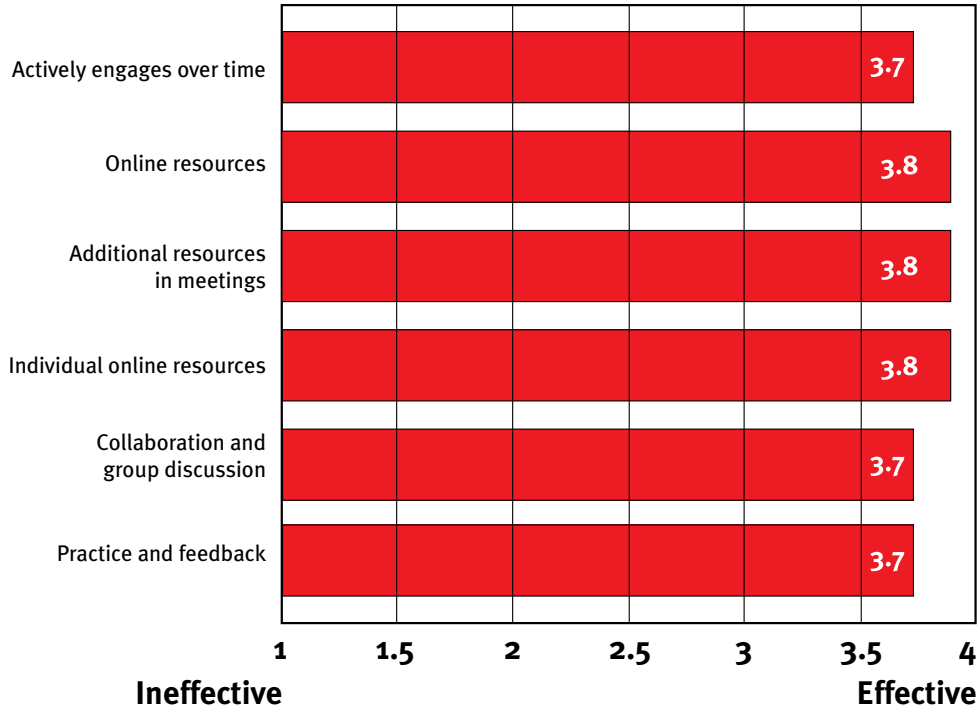
The *NCLB* criteria specifically call for professional development activities that are linked to a school- or district-wide plan (A:ii). Teachers thought that Scholastic RED was effective or very effective (M=3.9 with 4 being very effective) at linking to the district and building school improvement plans. Teachers agreed that the program was supported by district leadership (M=3.6) and recognized the value of the financial investment made by the district (“District provided funds to allow many teachers to take advantage of this course”). Teachers also valued the emergence of a “common literacy vocabulary in the district” and appreciated the critical mass at one of the sites (“ten teachers from our buildings are taking this class and sharing ideas”). Many teachers wanted more of their colleagues to participate in the program. Indeed, when asked what they would “wish for” in the program, the most common response was that other teachers at their site or in their department could take the Scholastic RED courses: “I wish more teachers who really need to take this would. I felt like the choir attended, but the people who would truly benefit need to come.”

Special education teachers (n=6) commented that the Scholastic RED program aligned with their mandated reading curriculum and “appreciate[d] the differentiated instruction for struggling readers.” One teacher suggested that special education teachers might be trained as a group so as to address “issues that general ed[ucation] teachers may not.”

## Efficacy of Scholastic RED Design and Delivery

Teachers also rated the effectiveness of the design and delivery of the Scholastic RED materials and the e-learning approach (see page 8). Although the federal criteria in section 9101(34) of the *No Child Left Behind* act of 2001 focus primarily on the content of professional development activities, subsection A:v clearly states that high-quality professional development programs are “sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused...and not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences” (*NCLB*, 2002). This criterion reflects current research about successful professional development models. According to research, professional development programs should be ongoing, use multiple instructional approaches, combine self-directed learning with collaboration, and provide opportunities for practice with feedback (Fullan, 1995; Stigler & Heibert, 1999; Wedman, Hughes, & Robinson, 1993).

**Figure 4: Level of Effectiveness of Scholastic RED Design and Delivery\***



\* teacher mean responses

### ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers rated the Scholastic RED program effective to very effective ( $M=3.7$ ) at actively engaging them over time: “I liked having a few months to work at my own time and pace—so much more fulfilling (and useful) than a single-day workshop where you can easily be overwhelmed.” Most teachers felt that the course effectively ( $M=3.6$ ) provided time and other resources for learning, practice, and follow-up. One teacher summed up the general feeling of the group: “Time is always an issue.”

Several teachers wished that they could take another Scholastic RED course. They related the course to their personal learning goals and thought the course helped them to effectively meet those goals ( $M=3.6$ ). As noted earlier, teachers used the research-based content as both guide and conscience as they progressed through the course. In addition, some teachers seemed to be developing critical reflection skills (“I tried things in my room and reflected on them”). Critical reflection is an important indicator of teacher learning. Researchers who have built on the work of Dewey and Piaget argue that adult learning and long-term change cannot occur without an ongoing cycle of experience and reflection (Schön, 1983).

*I wish all courses were this  
easy to learn from—  
my learning was  
individualized.”*

— 6<sup>th</sup> GRADE READING TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## MULTIPLE INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

Research has also shown that teachers benefit from professional development programs that employ multiple instructional approaches (Wedman, Hughes, & Robinson, 1993). When asked to rate the effectiveness of the different instructional approaches and materials in Scholastic RED, teachers were generally positive. In particular, teachers liked the combination of online and offline instruction, and the “wealth of resources.”

Teachers rated the online resources (e.g., REDTVs, classroom video models, faculty videos, related links, Ask the Expert, and professional articles) as effective or very effective ( $M=3.8$  with 4 being very effective). Teachers thought the course binder was “a good way to stay organized” ( $M=3.7$ ), although some teachers chose to develop their own system: “Organization [of the binder] didn’t fit my style, but I fixed that.” Of the handouts and resources provided by the facilitators, teachers thought that the graphic organizers were particularly effective ( $M=3.8$ ). Teachers also thought the session format (Learn–Apply–Check) was a very effective strategy ( $M=3.9$ ) that allowed them to “go back and review while answering a CheckPoint.”

## SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Adult learning theory suggests that adults have a deep need to be self-directing and that professional development must recognize and accommodate this nature of adult learning (Lawler, 1991). The online component of Scholastic RED provides teachers with interactive learning activities 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the Internet.

Teachers valued the accessibility of the online component of the program ( $M=3.9$ ) and “liked being able to work at home and at school” as well as being able to “learn in my jammies.” They rated the individual online activities as effective to very effective ( $M=3.8$ ). Several teachers mentioned the importance of working “at my own pace” and noted that the online activities were “user friendly for busy teachers.” Teachers seemed to feel that the program was flexible enough to accommodate not only their schedules, but also their personal learning goals and individual learning styles: “I wish all courses were this easy to learn from—my learning was individualized.”

## COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY

The combination of a rich, self-directed learning component with opportunities to collaborate and work within a school-based professional learning community has proven to be an effective model of professional development (Stigler & Heibert, 1999). As part of the Scholastic RED program, teachers met together with onsite facilitators four times to debrief their practice activities in the classroom. Teachers rated the group discussion as effective or very effective ( $M=3.8$ ), noting that the collaboration contributed to their understanding of the online content: “I got many good ideas at meetings that I didn’t get by just doing the work on the site.”

Once again the theme of time emerges as an issue. Several teachers commented that they wanted more time to “share ideas and learn from successful and unsuccessful experiences.” Overall, teachers were very enthusiastic about the benefits of these meetings; explanatory comments suggest the development of a professional learning community in which teachers felt safe to express what they do not know and want to learn (Siskin & Little, 1995).

## PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

As part of a cycle of continuous learning, facilitators encourage teachers to employ new strategies in the classroom, reflect on that practice, and receive and respond to feedback (Fullan, 1995). Scholastic RED offers teachers many opportunities to practice new teaching strategies both online and in person. Teachers reflect on their learning and practice in an online journal. In addition, the trained facilitators provide modeling and feedback as part of the study groups. Teachers rated the demonstrations by the facilitators as effective or very effective ( $M=3.8$ ) and several comments referenced the “open idea sharing” aspects of the study groups. Several teachers seemed to develop critical reflection and a sense of being part of a learning community. Teacher comments suggest that the combination of classroom practice, online reflection, and feedback from the group fostered a cycle of continuous learning in which teachers “felt free to speak, grow, learn.”

*“This has been the best  
professional development  
experience I’ve had in years!”*

— 7<sup>th</sup> GRADE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER  
KIRKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Summary

As demonstrated by the study for Missouri’s Kirkwood School District, Scholastic RED meets the *NCLB* criteria for high-quality professional development. The analysis reveals that the content of the program draws on scientifically based research to effectively meet the needs of teachers and students. Teachers valued the classroom-based activities and reported growing confidence in applying the strategies with their students. Teachers also thought that the program effectively aligned with site and district improvement plans as well as enabled them to help students meet state standards.

In addition to the rich and relevant content, the design and delivery of the Scholastic RED program meets *NCLB* criteria. Most teachers thought that the online and offline activities were very effective and were particularly enthusiastic about the collaborative components of the program. Open-ended comments suggest that some of the teachers in Missouri’s Kirkwood School District were engaging in critical reflection as part of a continuous learning cycle. Other comments point to the development of a professional learning community within the district.

Participants in the study were overwhelmingly positive about the overall effectiveness of the program both in their personal learning and in their classrooms. When asked to compare their experience with the Scholastic RED Professional Development course with other, recent professional development experiences, most teachers rated the Scholastic RED course as effective or very effective ( $M=3.8$ ). Several teachers commented that the experience was significantly better than other programs: “This has been the best professional development experience I’ve had in years!”

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